

Researchers and Feds to Address Quality of Science Used to Manage US Pacific Island Fisheries

HONOLULU (9 October 2019) Scientists from throughout the Pacific region will meet Oct. 15 to 17, 2019, in Honolulu to address the quality of the data used to manage federal fisheries and other topics. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will convene 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1400. The meeting is open to the public.

The lack of sufficient data to manage fisheries has been a continued concern, especially in the US Territories of American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Federal law requires that annual catch limits (ACLs) be set for each federally managed fish species. Typically, limits are based on stock assessments, but these are lacking for most of the hundreds of coral reef species caught in the islands.

In 2018, based on the Council's recommendation, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reduced the number of species requiring ACLs from 205 species or families to 11 in American Samoa, from 227 species or families to 13 in the Mariana Archipelago (Guam and the CNMI) and from 173 species or families to 20 in the Hawai'i Archipelago. The species no longer requiring ACLs are now considered "ecosystem components." They are being monitored until additional information is available to assess their stock status. By reducing the current need for ACLs to dozens of species, scientists and managers are able to allocate more resources to improving the datasets for those species without stock assessments.

One such effort is a recent review organized by the Council and NMFS on the quality, relevance and performance of the data collection systems in the US Pacific Territories. At the SSC meeting, the co-chairs of the review will report on the recommendations from that week-long effort by a panel of experts in the field. Key among these is the need to collect total catch and effort from fisheries targeting the key species by requiring mandatory reporting from fishers and vendors rather than relying on creel surveys. This recommendation is in line with actions taken by the three governments of the three US Territories to improve available information by instituting or considering mandatory permit and reporting requirements.

Another effort is the ongoing Council-sponsored biosampling studies on O'ahu and Maui by Poseidon Fisheries Research (PFR). From July 2018 to July 2019, PFR measured and weighed 10,256 fish on O'ahu, comprising 69 different "ecosystem component" species and 14 families. On Maui, as of August 2019, PFR measured 407 fish and worked with the marine biology class at Kamehameha Schools on that island to sample 91 fish from five species for life history information, e.g., sex, reproduction, size and age. Due to these efforts, the first life history article on palani (ringtail surgeonfish) and pualu (eyestripe surgeonfish) will be published in a journal.



Biosampling research is among ongoing efforts to improve available data for hundreds of fish species in Hawai'i and the US Pacific Territories.

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Other items on the SSC agenda

- The NMFS Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center's new stock assessment for the federally managed bottomfish species in American Samoa, Guam and CNMI shows a pessimistic stock status for American Samoa and Guam. The SSC will review the assessment and the Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review panel's report on it and decide whether this new assessment constitutes the best scientific information available for fishery management decisions.
- The SSC will review and consider the implications of a new model for loggerhead and leatherback turtle interactions in the Hawai'i shallow-set longline fishery for swordfish.
- The SSC will review and may make recommendations regarding the stock status of oceanic whitetip sharks (a species listed under the Endangered Species Act) and striped marlin.

Recommendations made by the SSC on these and other matters will be considered by the Council when it meets Oct. 22 to 24, 2019, at the Tauese P. F. Sunia Ocean Center in Utulei, American Samoa. For agendas and briefing documents for the SSC, Council and related advisory body meetings, go to <http://www.wpcouncil.org/public-meetings/> or contact the Council at info@wpcouncil.org or call (808) 522-8220.

Scientific and Statistical Committee: James Lynch (K&L Gates LLP) (chair); Debra Cabrera (University of Guam); Frank Camacho (University of Guam); Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland); Erik Franklin (University of Hawai'i, School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology); Shelton Harley (Minister of Fisheries, NZ); Ray Hilborn (University of Washington); Justin Hospital (NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center); David Itano (fisheries consultant); Donald Kobayashi (NMFS PIFSC); Steve Martell (SeaState Inc.); Domingo Ochavillo (American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources); Ryan Okano (Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources); Graham Pilling (Secretariat of the Pacific Community); Kurt Schaefer (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission); Craig Severance (University of Hawai'i at Hilo, retired); Michael Tenorio (CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife; and Michael Seki (ex-officio) (NMFS PIFSC).

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Secretary of Commerce appointees from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawaii governors: Archie Soliai, StarKist (American Samoa) (chair); John Gourley, Micronesia Environmental Services (CNMI) (vice chair); Michael Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (vice chair); Edwin Watamura, Waialua Boat Club (Hawai'i) (vice chair); Howard Dunham, commercial fisherman (American Samoa); Monique Genereux, business owner (Guam); Michael Goto, United Fishing Agency (Hawai'i); McGrew Rice, charter boat captain (CNMI). Designated state officials: Raymond Roberto, CNMI Dept. of Lands and Natural Resources; Suzanne Case, Hawai'i Dept. of Land & Natural Resources; Chelsa Muña-Brecht, Guam Dept. of Agriculture; Henry Seseapasara, American Samoa Dept. of Marine & Wildlife Resources. Designated federal officials (voting): Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office. Designated federal officials (non-voting): RADM Kevin Lunday, USCG 14th District; Michael Brakke, US Department of State; Brian Peck, USFWS.

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